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ABSTRACT

Current research on the relationship between home, school, and community is reviewed and juxtaposed to perspectives on communities developed by scholars of families and child development, community developers, and urban sociologists. Research findings suggest the importance of learning more about the communities in which family involvement projects are located. Researchers and school staff should become part of community mapping efforts, which would not only strengthen the links between schools, universities, and the community, but would also provide rich information about community assets. The current work of community developers suggests that looking at the school from the vantage point of the community shows it to be an essential player in community redevelopment. Partnerships between schools and businesses and community agencies have been one of the most studied aspects of community involvement in schools. Researchers now need to focus on the various kinds of school-based comprehensive services being started across the United States. In addition, the social networks families use to assist them in their relationships with schools should be explored. (Contains 65 references.) (SLD)

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Occasional Paper #14

Reconsidering the Role of Community in Home-School Links: Implications for Research and Practice

by

Martha de Acosta

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As more urban school districts face rising dropout rates, decreasing graduation rates, and underachievement, programs to involve families in education have multiplied. It is now commonly acknowledged that schools cannot have the sole responsibility for educating children. For the most part, studies of home-school links have focused on these two institutions. Family-focused remedies, however, will very probably not lead to success "because they ignore the structural realities of today's families, the resources available to them, and their ability to interact with the school" (Brice-Heath & Wallin-McLaughlin, 1987).

A narrow focus on these two institutions is a result of the evolution of school-community relations in the last thirty years and the accompanying shifts in educational discourse and research. In the sixties, as part of the trend to give groups previously marginalized by segregation a voice in their children's education, parents were included in school and district decision making. In most cities, their involvement was mandated and met with resistance by local school administrators. Many communities mobilized around educational issues and, in some cases, confronted school staff about governance and curricular issues. In the late sixties, studies of community and parental involvement were synonymous with studies of governance (Dentler & Gans, 1965). In the early eighties, attention to a failing economy and the publication of data showed that urban schools were falling behind the national average in test scores and graduation rates led to a public perception that the schools were not preparing the workers needed for the work place (National Commission on Excellence on Education, 1983). School districts were placed under pressure to increase accountability.

By this time, most large urban districts served mainly poor minority students and many educators identified the home as the source of students' underachievement. In the late eighties, supportive family involvement began to gain acceptance as a new way of intervening to improve student achievement. By the nineties, some community people and researchers became critical of how some school districts created participation mechanisms where school staff dictated which issues could be raised (de Acosta, 1993) and became suspicious of parents being "invited to the now deficit-ridden public sphere of public education" (Fine, 1993).

At the same time that those changes were taking place in schools, two research findings lent legitimacy to practitioners who focused their attention on those activities conducted by

school staff to involve parents and the community. One finding showed that there was no relationship between community participation in governance and improvement in students' achievement. A second finding showed that teachers' and parents' behaviors were among the most significant variables accounting for increased parental involvement (Epstein, 1992). As a result of the changes that were taking place in schools and the dissemination of these research findings, advocates and researchers of family involvement focused on changing the behavior of families, teachers, and principals and examined the effect of specific family and school processes on educational achievement (Chavkin, 1987; Clark, 1988; Slaughter, 1987).

A positive result of this line of research was that its findings undermined deterministic predictions about the inability of poor minority children to succeed in school (Slaughter-Defoe, Takanishi & Johnson, 1990). At the same time, by focusing almost exclusively on homes and schools, these researchers missed the various interrelationships between families and the communities in which they conduct their daily lives, between schools and the communities in which they are located and, when busing is practiced, between the schools and the communities in which their students live.

Granted, practitioners and researchers in the field of family involvement have taken notice of cultural contexts and studied the effect of socialization in different social, cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds (Chavkin, 1993). For the most part, however, they have missed practices that support families outside the schools and ways in which families seek the advice or the resources of others.

Grounded in first-hand knowledge of Cleveland where settlement houses, neighborhood centers, and community-based organizations have played strong roles in assisting families to make it in the city, and my work with neighborhood centers and community-based organizations in low-income neighborhoods in this city, I argue for including community in the conceptualization, research, and practice of home-school links.

Including the larger social context from which families draw meaning and support, we expand the options we may consider when designing family involvement strategies. Such an argument is based not only on personal experience, but is supported by a holistic perspective of child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) and a comprehensive approach to addressing dismal

outcomes for inner city children (Schorr, 1988).

Practitioners working to enhance school-home links and researchers studying this topic have used the term *community* without defining it. The term usually refers to a residential area in which people share common values and traditions, although it is also often used interchangeably with neighborhood (which frequently does not imply a shared set of beliefs). The term is also used to characterize ethnic communities, to refer to people who share common values but do not necessarily reside together. In the home-school literature, community is used to denote a wide range of referents including among others: neighborhood, community agencies, organizations and businesses, ethnic and racial enclaves, and reference groups.

Relying on taken-for-granted notions of *community*, researchers have added variables such as income, education, race, and ethnicity to discriminate among families, as well as among communities. Although much has been learned about families and communities this way, in this paper I explore what we can learn from research on communities.

With the intention of sparking new ways of studying family involvement in the context of communities, particularly communities in the inner city, I review current research on the relationship between three spheres—home, school, and community—and juxtapose it to perspectives on communities developed by scholars of families and child development, community developers, and urban sociologists (Cochran, 1993; Garbarino & Kostelny, 1993; McKnight & Kretzman, 1990). This juxtaposition brings out the contributions that these perspectives on communities can add to our thinking about family involvement. I conclude by outlining research themes that arise from this reframing of family involvement.

Home-School Links

Most of the literature about home-school links has consisted of research and reports on family involvement projects and recommendations to enhance home-school links (Henderson, 1987; Rich, 1993). Although this literature is far from homogeneous, some salient themes can be identified. First, it is characterized by a positive outlook on what can be accomplished by changing existing school and family practices, and it highlights the options people have about how they can change their behavior.

Second, until recently most of the intervention practices to enhance family involvement and research in this literature have been targeted at families with small children and/or elementary schools (Epstein, 1992). Only recently is new research emerging on the effect of children's age and grade on home-school links (Brian, 1994; Epstein, 1992).

Third, in this literature, types of involvement and variations in involvement according to the families' racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, and level of parental education have been distinguished (Chavkin, 1993; Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Ritter, Mont-Reynaud & Dornbush, 1993). Some practitioners are beginning to study the processes by which families of different social backgrounds accomplish their involvement (Clark, 1993; Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Hidalgo, 1993; Siu, 1993). Research still needs to be pursued about the relationship between individuals' construction of their ethnic identity and family and community processes (Brice-Heath & Wallin-McLaughlin, 1991).

Thinking in the field of home-school links has been mapped by Epstein (1992) into four theoretical models that differ in their conceptualization of the responsibilities of schools and families. These responsibilities have been perceived as separate, sequenced, embedded, and overlapping. The first two were dominant in earlier times; I will focus on the last two since they are of interest to those attempting to enhance home-school links.

The embedded influence model is typified by the ecological research and thinking pioneered by Bronfenbrenner. This model postulates that the multiple environments in which family members participate influence family processes and children's outcomes.

The overlapping influence model, proposed by Epstein, reflects "spheres, that can, by design, be pushed together or pulled apart by practices and interpersonal forces in each environment" (Epstein, 1992). The overlapping spheres model shares two key elements with the embedded model: the centrality of the child as the actor around which the ecosystem revolves and the child's age in conceptualizing the changing relationships between settings. The two models differ, however, in their conceptualization of human agency. While they both acknowledge the role of interventions in changing the ecosystem and affecting children's outcomes, the overlapping influence model construes parents, children, and school staff as having an active role in modifying the links between schools and families and, consequently, capable of positively impacting students'

success. As a result, the overlapping model leads to questions about the effects of specific types of links between schools and families (Epstein, 1992).

Research questions based on this model have produced more precise answers about the effects of some variables on home-school links. Consider Epstein's (1992) observation that time affects the amount of overlap between home and school responsibilities. She has noted how both age and grade level of the children and historic time, through changes in the environment, affect family members' behaviors and beliefs.

The overlapping model has led as well to a typology of family involvement that covers a range of family and school staff behavior within the area of overlap of spheres of influences. The six types of involvement encompass the basic obligations of families (Type 1), the basic obligations of schools (Type 2), parent involvement at school (Type 3), parent involvement in learning activities at home (Type 4), parent involvement in decision making, governance, and advocacy (Type 5), and, finally, schools' collaboration with community organizations (Type 6).

By classifying family involvement by the type of behavior of the actors, the actors who perform it, and the setting in which they take place, we have expanded the kinds of activities to which family involvement refers. At the same time, as is true of all classifications, by choosing a set of criteria to organize our knowledge, certain work and practices are hidden from view. I argue in this paper that bringing those practices to view would show the greater interrelatedness that exists between families and communities.

Community-School Links

As noted above, Epstein has added a sixth type of involvement to her typology: collaboration with community organizations. By adding this type of involvement to the five she had developed earlier, Epstein tapped into one type of actor and setting that may support families in educating their children. Epstein, however, limits her characterization of community involvement to collaboration with agencies, organizations, and groups established to provide or coordinate families' access to community and support services.

It is not surprising that collaboration with community agencies is receiving increased attention from researchers. Indeed it is a very visible kind of community participation. By 1988,

over 140,000 school-community partnerships had been formed nationwide (Jones, 1992). As resources to school districts are reduced and national perception of school effectiveness diminishes, the push to form collaboratives has increased dramatically. In a study of schools participating in the League of Schools Reaching Out, a group of schools actively reaching out to the homes, Davies, Burch, and Johnson (1992) found all schools were participating in at least one working partnership with community agencies or businesses. The success of collaboration with businesses that participate in adopt-a-school programs and give release time to their employees to serve as mentors has been highlighted across the country.

Less attention has been given to collaboration with community-based organizations, although they have been involved in a variety of activities—collaborating with schools to provide advocacy for school reform measures, helping to establish family involvement in the schools, and providing educational and social services for the children and their families (New York Community Trust, cited in Jones, 1992).

The work done by community members in support of students, which is also often overlooked, has been brought to light by Nettles (1989,1991,1992), who has studied involvement from the perspective of the community instead of that of the school. She found that many community programs had positive effects on school-related behaviors, achievement, attitudes, and risk-taking behavior. Nettles (1991) contributed to a more refined analysis of the evaluation results of these programs by examining them in terms of four kinds of community involvement: 1) conversion, transforming the student's belief or behavior; 2) mobilization, increasing individual and organizational participation in the educational process to change institutions; 3) allocation, increasing access to resources and providing support services to students; and 4) instruction, supporting academic and social learning (Nettles, 1991).

Regarding conversion, Nettles (1991) found that although anecdotal evidence documents cases of behavioral change in students, "systematic research on this phenomenon with disadvantaged students is rare" (Nettles, 1991). Historically, mobilization began in the community where community organizers, youth advocates, and parents organized to improve services and opportunities for young people. More recently schools are initiating outreach efforts to engage parents and the community (Nettles, 1991).

Allocation efforts are targeted at improving students' access to services and opportunities through school-based and community-based programs. Allocation has been documented mostly through case studies of partnerships between schools and community agencies, social service agencies, postsecondary institutions, and businesses. One of the most comprehensive models of community-school links has been developed by school-based community centers, known as Beacons, currently operating in the intermediate and elementary schools in the city of New York. Beacons are managed by community-based organizations in collaboration with community school boards, principals, community advisory boards, and others (New York City, 1992). Based on a neighborhood approach, the specific range of services offered at each school varies, ranging from social services for youth and adults, recreation, education and vocational activities, health education, and referrals, to a setting for community meetings. All the Beacons are working with the local police to create drug-free zones around the schools (New York City, 1992).

More attention needs to be given in the home-school link literature to programs not based in the schools, including what effects they have on the students and how they could be articulated with school activities. Research evidence suggests that these programs have positive effects on children and youth. In particular, participating in extracurricular activities and volunteering in the community have been shown to have positive effects on academic achievement and on an improved sense of well-being of disadvantaged students (Trent & McPartland, 1982 cited in Nettles, 1992); the strongest relationship was found in low-income and low-achieving males (Holland & Andre, 1987 cited in Nettles, 1992); Steinberg, Brown, Cider, Kaczmarek and Lazzaro, 1988 cited in Nettles, 1992). Howe (1990) and Brice-Heath and Wallin-McLaughlin (1987) suggest that contacts with adults through programs such as mentoring and community-based youth activities provide additional and, in some cases, alternative systems of support to the ones provided by family and school.

In addition, evidence shows that when community members support students in informal ways, such support has positive effects on academic success. It has been found that African-American teenage females who succeed in the face of tremendous odds do so with the support of caring adults in their communities. In a study of African-American teenage mothers, those who had either family or communal support were more successful than peers who did not. Even in

cases when family support did not exist, a friend's mother, an older friend, a coach, and even a boyfriend provided the care and motivation that contributed to the students' educational advantage. In contrast, those adolescent mothers who were unable to name any sources of support for their education were "completely detached from school" (Danziger & Farber, 1990).

Finally, instruction in community settings covers a wide range of instructional services, from motivating students to providing specific skills. The agencies providing the instructional programs often address many of the needs of the families they serve. Evaluations of these programs have found stronger effects on student attendance, sense of personal control, and positive attitudes toward school than on grades. Evaluations have consistently shown that level of participation of the students in the programs and degree of involvement of parents at home are significant variables that affect program outcomes. (Nettles, 1991).

Community-Home-School Links

Studies of community-home-school links have covered one or more of the following community and family aspects: history, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religious affiliation, educational attainments, and assets or capacities. In an analysis that highlights the role played by social class in the ways families become involved in children's education, Lareau explains the processes by which social and cultural capital are transformed into tangible outcomes. When comparing upper-middle-class families with working-class families, she found that the former consulted with relatives, friends, neighbors, and mothers of other children in their child's classroom to exchange information. "Upper-middle-class parents had much more information about the educational process in general and about the specifics of their children's school-site experience than did working-class parents" (Lareau, 1989, p. 9). Lareau also found differences in the substance of the families' involvement practices according to the communities' socioeconomic level. At times, parents in middle-class communities took courses of action that would not necessarily be considered supportive by school staff but that benefitted their children's educational career, while working-class parents only engaged in work that followed teachers' instructions. Finally, Lareau found that parents had different styles of home-school links. She attributes these differences in style to the type of work that the adults in these families engaged in and to their

cultural capital in dealing with the schools. In her analysis Lareau incorporates key elements of the ecological perspective (relationship between the settings where children and parents participate) and studies the networks parents rely on.

In an examination of the way Puerto Rican families relate to social and educational services, Delgado (1993) argues that education and social service providers need to work collaboratively with natural support systems, such as the extended family, folk healers, religious groups, and social clubs. Based on the experience the Puerto Rican community has had with formal systems, Delgado anticipates barriers to collaboration but predicts great potential for such partnerships as well.

Wilson's (1988) evaluation of four sites where community participation was a strong component of educational projects to build local capacities complements Delgado's conclusion. Wilson (1988) found that minority subcultures had a preference for non-formal styles of interaction and suggests that typical ways of thinking about relationships with clients in schools and other social service agencies do not incorporate this style. He concludes "acknowledging the legitimacy of informal ties may be a powerful way to build parental influence into decision making" (p.163).

Both studies build on Ogbu's (1987) finding that the history of relationships that disadvantaged and minority families have had with mainstream institutions may create barriers and obstacles to parent participation. The antagonistic relationship that the African-American community has had with schools (Comer & Haynes, 1991) and the deferential relationship that new immigrants may show towards school and school staff shape different patterns of involvement.

Evaluations are beginning to be conducted of collaborations between community agencies, schools, and families. Donaldsonville is an example of a poor rural community in which a school is a broker mobilizing resources within families and the communities to educate children (Edwards & Jones-Young, 1992). PRIDE, is an example of a joint project between Southwest Texas State University and the San Marcos Consolidated Independent School District building a collaborative between a wide range of community agencies to reduce the district's high dropout rate (Chavkin, 1993). In the case of PRIDE, the school is the center of all the activities for the children in the school district.

Finally, schools can be at the center of community mapping through action research that

makes school staff, parents, and community people active agents of their community development (Goode, 1990). As the action research progresses in a community portrait project, the team becomes aware of the relatedness of school, family, and community in ways that cannot be anticipated by merely studying the community organizations. A review of successful community development projects that use the school as a central asset shows that they had all gained the trust of principals and key teachers. Only after this was accomplished could the task of connecting the school and the students to a wide range of community resources and institutions be addressed (Kretzmann, n.d).

Although research is progressing in the study of collaboratives, not as much research has been done to document the role of informal networks and systems of support for families in the education of children and youth (Garlington, 1991). In a report of a project she conducted to involve low-income African-American families in their children's education, Garlington acknowledges the role that networks can play. She contends that many social service agencies misconstrue empowerment as an individual behavior. The women in her project, however, made it clear to her that individual empowerment, or self-sufficiency, meant being alone to them. The project she directed created "a context which these women could rely on" (p. 150).

Serendipity played a role in uncovering the social networks used by parents in a study in Mexico City. Almeida, whose study is described in Bronfenbrenner, Moen & Garbarino (1984), conducted controlled training on child development. He studied one group of teachers alone and another of teachers and parents together. Although he expected to find a direct association between parental participation and enhanced children's learning, he discovered that in some neighborhoods the control groups also showed significant gains. Indeed, the greatest gains were made in neighborhoods with strong social networks where parents in the experimental group discussed what they had learned with parents in the control group.

Understanding How Communities Affect the Home-School Link

The ecological perspective on child development has shown the importance of studying the settings in which the child and the family members conduct their lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). In the next section I outline three kinds of studies of the context in which families conduct their lives: studies of the effect of neighborhood environments on children and their families, studies of the effect of social networks on families, and studies that map community capacities.

The Effects of Neighborhood Environments

Many studies have documented the devastating effects of poverty on children's development and on their families' ability to cope. Wilson (1987) has shown that the economic exclusion and social isolation faced by residents of very poor neighborhoods intensifies the effects of living in those areas. Elaborating on research about the detrimental effects of poor neighborhoods on children and families, Coulton and Pandey (1992), have found that in some of the poor neighborhoods, certain factors appear to protect children from the worst outcomes. In neighborhoods with higher levels of integration in terms of income and age, i.e. in poor neighborhoods that have a mix of families with a wider range of income and more older people living in them, families seem to respond better to the dismal conditions of poverty (Coulton, 1994).

Residential instability, a community-level variable, has been found to be a major structural obstacle to community-level social organization; moreover, regardless of an individual's length of residence, residential stability at the community level fostered her/his social integration (Sampson, 1991).

Youths in socially disorganized neighborhoods tend to engage in more at-risk behaviors than youths in other neighborhoods. The relationship, however, is not direct. Gender, race, age, and socioeconomic status appear to mediate that relationship. For example, community disorganization was found to be positively related to negative peer influence and school disengagement. Females in disorganized neighborhoods engaged in aggressive crime more often than female youths in other neighborhoods, but this effect was not evident in other forms of female delinquent behavior. Male aggressive crime, but neither theft nor vandalism, was affected by community disorganization (Gottfredson, McNeill, & Gottfredson cited in Nettles, 1992).

Families transmit skills and points of view to their children based on their ideas of how to

succeed in this world. As Ogbu (1985) has noted, these ideas are part of a shared cultural knowledge based on families' perception of tasks and positions available to them and ideas about how to get ahead. The community in which families live affects those ideas by the information that is accessible to them, native notions about how the world works, and perceptions about children (Okagaki & Divecha, 1993). Another important source of parenting beliefs is the work place, where what parents learn about what it takes to succeed is passed on to their children (Crouter & McHale, 1993). Last, in this time of constant media intrusion into our daily lives, we should give attention to the way images and messages in the popular media interact with the immediate reality that families face.

In cases of extreme poverty and violence both the parents and the children are doing what appears to them to be best at the time, although it may not be adaptive to the person's life situation (Bronfenbrenner, 1985). In impoverished, dangerous, urban neighborhoods, for instance, parents often choose coping strategies that are appropriate for their children's survival but at the same time limit their opportunities and their ability to become autonomous. Under those circumstances, restrictive and punitive parental discipline is a parental strategy (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1993). One such strategy is locking-in the children as soon as they return from school to keep them away from streets where drug dealers roam freely (Burton, 1991).

Rutter and his colleagues (cited in Bronfenbrenner, 1986) found that, irrespective of the families' background characteristics, persons living in inner-city London shared a higher rate of psychiatric disorder. Rutter and Giller (cited in Bronfenbrenner, 1986) developed an adversity index (that included elements such as family size and marital discord) and found that when family adversity was controlled there was no effect on children's mental disorder. They were able to conclude that this effect was produced indirectly through the disrupting of families.

Parents' inability, at times, to control the effect of the environment on the children, particularly as they get older, suggests that the neighborhood's effect on the children follows two paths. It influences the parents' behavior, which in turn, affects the children, and, at the same time, has direct effects on the children. Furthermore, living in a dangerous environment puts a burden on parents who attempt to buffer the effects of the environment. When parents are "pushed beyond their stress absorption capacity" (Garbarino, Dubrow, Kostelny, Pardo, 1992)

this chronic environmental violence can affect children.

Nettles (1992) has reviewed research that shows that several characteristics of physical settings, such as the adequacy of the buildings, crowding, and noise level, can affect student development. Once again, the way that the characteristics of the physical environment affected children was both direct and mediated by parents. Parents in crowded dwellings did not know their children's friends nor the parents of these children. Furthermore, under the stress created by crowding, they tended to punish their children more and give little support (Groves & Hughes, cited in Nettles, 1992).

Mapping Community Capacities

Another line of research with a strong action goal that can be of use to practitioners in the field of family involvement has been generated by community developers. For many years community developers conducted needs assessment surveys; more recently they are mapping community capacities. What is radically different about this shift is that instead of viewing urban residents as consumers of services they are seen as actively developing their assets (McKnight & Kretzman, 1990). Community developers map both individual and organizational assets and make plans to begin building on those assets that are most accessible—those that "are located in the neighborhood and controlled by those who live in the neighborhood" (McKnight & Kretzmann, 1990; Kretzmann, n.d.). Surveys of community assets describe, among other things, the skills, experience, and talents of its residents and organizations based in the neighborhoods. Community developers recognize that they need to mobilize all the assets at hand and salient among them are the local schools (Kretzmann, n.d.).

In Cleveland a comprehensive and integrated model has been used to design a plan of strategies tailored to individual neighborhoods, based on the neighborhood's assets and with the communities actively involved in setting priorities and choices (Cleveland Foundation Commission on Poverty, 1992).

Communities as Social Networks

Those analysts who have minimized the geographically based nature of communities have focused instead on the patterns of relationships and, of particular interest to us, on social networks. They have examined network size, composition (specific types of ties such as family and

work), duration, density, frequency of contact between individuals, and amount and range of resources flowing through them to interpret the social behavior of the individuals involved (Cochran, 1993; Leighton, 1988).

Many of the studies that describe and analyze the disorganization of families have focused on insular households and families, ignoring the social ties across generations, kin help across households, and even social bonds across geographical boundaries maintained by two-way migrations (Elder, 1985). Elder notes a significant shift occurred in studies of families and children in the seventies: instead of asking what conditions produce family disorganization, researchers began to study processes by which families avoid disorganization under trying circumstances. According to Elder this shift was accompanied by greater attention to context, process, and time. This is the kind of focus I am suggesting we need to turn to in research about families and schools.

Research findings show some of the positive effects of social networks on families' ability to socialize their children. The decline in density of acquaintanceship in a rapidly changing community, for instance, was found to have a negative effect on the socialization of the children. On the contrary, communities with a high density of aquaintanceship were communities where everybody looked after the children; and the children reported that the adults in their community told their parents when they saw the children doing something they shouldn't have been doing (Freudenberg, 1986). In addition, families in poor urban neighborhoods with weaker support neighborhoods were found to take longer to recover from crises (Schorr, 1988).

An analysis of social network research shows, however, that it is not simply the strength of the relationship that influences behavior. Cochran (1993) researched the influence of life events on the formation of personal networks. She found that life events that moved a person in the direction of forming a new identity, such as a divorce, was a stimulus for network reorganization. But how much autonomy does an individual have in finding new networks? Weis's (1985) evidence is indicative of the constraints that poor black mothers face when they want to escape welfare. In her study, low-income black women, whose main motivation for going back to school was to achieve a better life for their children, found that the exchange networks on which they relied for help were also a bond to the situation they wanted to leave (Weis, 1985). Although they had planned to escape welfare and life in the ghetto they found it much harder to break away

from their networks than the men, since they were the ones who had primary responsibility for raising the children (Weis, 1985).

Networks in poor neighborhoods tend to be small and intense (Stack, 1974) but isolated from one another (Granovetter, 1982). Although strong ties in small networks may offer security and emotional support, they may, at the same time, limit access to information and resources that might enhance the healthy development of the families and children (Coulton & Pandey, 1992).

Implications of Community-Home-School Links for Research and Practice

The research findings and the conceptual explorations that I have presented suggest research opportunities in the study of family involvement. Research findings suggest the importance of learning more about the communities in which the family involvement projects are located. Researchers and school staff should become part of community mapping efforts, which would not only strengthen the links between the schools, universities, and the community, but would also provide us with rich information about community assets.

Most of the research on home-school links has been conducted by educational researchers who have looked out into the community from the school window. The current work of community developers suggests a new perspective that can be gained by walking into the community and looking at the school from that vantage point. From there the school appears as a vital player in community redevelopment, one without whose support little can be accomplished, but not necessarily the only one, nor the one who will consistently initiate action.

Given the greater awareness we have gained of community assets we may well ask: Are there other models of community and family involvement? What is the extent of the initiative taken by schools in home-school projects? How has this affected the role other community organizations assume, and what are the expectations and relationships between these new partners (Edwards & Jones-Young, 1992)?

Partnerships between schools and businesses and community agencies are one of the most studied aspects of community involvement in schools. Research needs to focus now on the various kinds of school-based comprehensive services being started across the country. More process evaluations of how practitioners at the various agencies, organizations, and schools arrive

at common understandings about service delivery, and the negotiation of turf issues will provide information about how partnerships work.

While research on partnerships has already begun, little exploration has been done about how families employ social networks to assist them in their relationship with schools. Much can be learned from social and health research about the structure, composition, and functions of social networks. Does parents' position in a social network affect their involvement in their children's education? What is the relationship between need and use of social networks and life course of various family members?

Cochran (1993), who has studied the relationship between networks and parenting has suggested the following three research questions: What forces and factors influence the development of social networks? What is the role of a parent in building a network? How do the resulting networks affect parenting attitudes and behaviors?

Nettles (1992) has asked whether planned involvement strategies facilitate or impede naturally occurring community processes. How does assuming these different roles affect the work of teachers and principals? What roles are given to teachers in the different models of community outreach? How do differences in the ethnicity, race, income, and education of the families affect outcomes or processes regarding the role of the schools?

Studies of the work done through social networks may lead to an understanding of the influence of the cultural/ecological background on families. Process-oriented ethnographic research of the relationship between individuals' construction of their ethnic identity, as well as studies about the strategies used by families to mediate cultural influences will identify the various networks used by individuals and by families.

Finally, we need to ask how increasing family and community involvement or implementing different models of community involvement affects the roles of teachers and principals.

Summary

In summary, by bringing to light the work done by communities often missing from a home-school links perspective, I have shown how practice in this area could be enhanced. I have argued the value of thinking carefully about what is meant by *community* and to generously define *community* to include the various ways it influences families. Families become involved in their children's education as part of their family tasks pursued in communities with very definite characteristics. We need to incorporate an understanding of these communities in our studies of family involvement. I have suggested themes and questions for the home-school link research agenda that incorporate approaches to family and community not common in this area.

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